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Policy issues

Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of United Nations summits, in particular the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and major intergovernmental meetings of relevance to the United Nations Environment Assembly

Programme of Research on Climate Change Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present note. to which reference is made in the reports of the Executive Director on the implementation of Governing Council decision 27/2 (UNEP/EA.1/2/Add.1) and on the state of the environment (UNEP/EA.1/4 and Add.1), provides an overview of the progress made in developing the global Programme of Research on Climate Change Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation (PROVIA) since the twenty-seventh and first universal session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme.

It is concluded that measurable progress has been made by PROVIA during the reporting period. Continuous support from Governments and partners, however, is key to enabling the initiative to respond effectively to the need for better information on climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation for Governments and other main stakeholders.

* UNEP/EA.1/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The Global Programme of Research on Climate Change Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation (PROVIA)[1] represents an interface between the research community and decision makers and other stakeholders to improve policy-relevant research on vulnerability, impacts and adaptation (VIA), allowing scientists to coordinate and facilitate the dissemination and practical application of their research. PROVIA helps international community of practice share practical experiences and research findings by improving the availability and accessibility of knowledge to the people that need it most. PROVIA aims to do so together with collaborative partners, knowledge networks, and the larger VIA community, by identifying research needs and gaps, helping scientific community to mobilize and communicate the growing knowledge-based on VIA so that governments and other main stakeholders are able to solicit scientific knowledge into their decision making processes.

2. PROVIA has two overarching objectives:

(a) To advance policy-relevant research on vulnerability, impacts and adaptation related to climate change;

(b) To coordinate and facilitate the dissemination and practical application of this research for benefit and value of society.

3. Specific objectives of PROVIA are:

(a) To build a new and important interface between the research community and decision makers and other stakeholders involved in VIA issues;

(b) To promote communication between the community of researchers working on VIA issues and users, by providing a vehicle for exchanging new research results, encouraging cooperative work on specific research challenges, and providing a forum for improving the relevance of research;

(c) To identify VIA research gaps, priorities and critical emerging issues that are important to both the science and policy communities;

(d) To provide a new avenue by which decision makers can solicit scientific input to new critical policy issues;

(e) To contribute to the capacity building of young scientists in developing countries to carry out scientific assessments of climate change VIA.

II. Progress, current status and future directions

4. In February 2013, the twenty-seventh and first universal session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (Nairobi, 18-22 February 2013) adopted a decision on PROVIA[2] that provided much needed political support from the Member States to PROVIA.

5. In May 2013, the World Meteorological Organization Executive Council decided to include PROVIA as a component of the World Climate Programme (WCP) in addition to the existing three components the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), and the World Climate Service Programme (WCSP).[3]

6. Following the inclusion in the WCP, PROVIA has been actively engaged in the WMO EC Working Group on Climate and Related Weather, Water and Environment Matters (ECWG-CWE) Seventh Session meeting (10-12 December 2013, Geneva)[4], and the GCOS Steering Committee Twenty-first Session meeting on 22-24 October 2013 in Offenbeach, Germany.

7. Over the period from March 2013 to March 2014 PROVIA has implemented the work plan agreed by the PROVIA Scientific Steering Committee (SSC), which included the activities, and delivered outputs as follows:

[1] http://www.unep.org/provia.

[2] UNEP/GC.27/17.V.

[3] Resolution 6 (EC-65).

[4] http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/wcp/cca/documents/ECWGCWE-7-Report_270114_Final.pdf.

8. **Activity 1: Defining global research priorities to support adaptation planning and implementation.** A report 'Research Priorities on Vulnerability, Impacts, and Adaptation: Responding to the Climate Change Challenge'[5] was published. The report compiles global VIA research priorities identified through a consultation process with both scientists and policymakers to respond to the demand for better coordination of policy-relevant research. The 33 topics are organized in three sections: information to support policy decisions; systems and regions; and emerging topics. Vulnerabilities of the following systems are addressed: food system; water system; ecosystems; energy system; and infrastructure systems and the build environment. Critical geographical areas are also identified. A summary of the findings was disseminated at various fora including the nineteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 19, November 2013, Warsaw, Poland).

9. **Activity 2: Provide advice and scientific information to the UNFCCC and other international bodies, to enable more effective adaptation.** PROVIA is, in a number of ways, an active provider of scientific information to the UNFCCC process, and is now a designated partner of the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. PROVIA presented its research priorities for vulnerability, impacts and adaptation to the UNFCCC SBSTA 38 Research Dialogue Workshop (June 2013, Bonn, Germany).

10. **Activity 3: Strengthen communication within the Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation Research community and provide an interface with stakeholders affected by climate change.** PROVIA is promoting communication of VIA information through a number of mechanisms, including a regularly updated PROVIA website[6] and a quarterly newsletter. PROVIA is one of the strategic partners and conveners of a biennial International Adaptation Conference that brings together research scientists, policy makers and practitioners from developed and developing countries to share knowledge about adaptation challenges and opportunities. In May 2014, PROVIA co-hosted The Third International Climate Change Adaptation Conference 2014 (Adaptation Futures 2014, Fortaleza, Brazil). The Fourth International Climate Change Adaptation Conference 2016 will be organised by the European Union (EU) and PROVIA and will be hosted by the Government of the Netherlands to coincide with the Dutch presidency of the EU.

11. **Activity 4: Improving practices of assessing climate change vulnerability, impacts, and adaptation.** PROVIA has released 'PROVIA Guidance on Assessing Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation to Climate Change'[7] dedicated to climate adaptation planners. The guidance helps adaptation practitioners assess vulnerability, impacts and adaptation, covering the wide array of approaches, methods and tools with focus on practical implication to the development of specific, sectoral or place-based approaches with case studies and good practices for effective adaptation. The recommendations of the publication were featured at the nineteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 19, November 2013, Warsaw, Poland). A summary[8] was produced to provide an overview of the PROVIA guidance report. Another report 'Supporting NAP development with the PROVIA Guidance: A user companion'[9] was also produced to explain how the PROVIA Guidance can be used to better understand key concepts and available methods and tools to support UNFCCC National Adaptation Planning Process[10].

12. In 2013, the PROVIA Communication and Outreach Strategy was developed and adopted by the PROVIA SSC to help achieve its organizational objectives, and to help PROVIA engage effectively with internal and external partners and stakeholders. PROVIA implements outreach strategy through the growing network of scientists, practitioners and decision-makers to improve the availability and accessibility of VIA knowledge for effective adaptation.

13. The PROVIA Resource Mobilization Strategy was developed and adopted by the PROVIA SSC to outline an overall strategic approach for PROVIA to efficiently and effectively mobilize resources for its work.

[5] http://www.unep.org/provia/RESOURCES/Publications/ResearchPriorities/tabid/130750/Default.aspx.

[6] http://www.unep.org/provia.

[7] http://www.unep.org/provia/RESOURCES/Publications/PROVIAGuidancereport/tabid/130752/Default.aspx.

[8] http://www.unep.org/provia/Portals/24128/PROVIA_guidance_summary_low%20resolution.pdf.

[9] http://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/Climate/PROVIA-NAP-user-companion-2014.pdf.

[10] http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/application/pdf/naptechguidelines_eng_high__res.pdf.

14. The work of PROVIA is constrained by limited resources available. UNEP has been the only organization supporting PROVIA since its inception in 2010. Acknowledging the potential of PROVIA in filling the VIA knowledge gaps, the Government of UK provided a voluntary financial contribution that has allowed supporting some priority activities.

15. PROVIA is seeking sustained sources of funding for the activities and the Secretariat. The PROVIA Secretariat is understaffed, while the activities of PROVIA continue to increase in number and scope. The PROVIA Secretariat will need to grow in order to support implementation of planned activities effectively, especially as PROVIA continues to increase in visibility and prominence.

16. For 2014 the PROVIA SSC has agreed to focus on the following:

(a) *Promoting a science-policy dialogue:* develop a series of Policy Briefs to facilitate regular reporting to policymakers and civil society of the latest results from the VIA community; organize a series of regional and national science-policy dialogue meetings with policymakers and other stakeholders;

(b) *Reaching out to a wider community:* communicating findings from recently published two PROVIA reports. Produce a regular e-newsletter (quarterly) that will provide information on upcoming events, new developments, and publications; maintain the PROVIA website[11]. PROVIA will be engaged to assist outreaching the findings of IPCC WGII Fifth Assessment Report;

(c) *Capacity building - cultivating a new generation of scientists:* support a mentoring program for young research fellows from developing countries in the area of VIA research. This would be carried out in close cooperation with START[12], The One United Nations Learning Partnership (UN CC:Learn), the UNEP AIACC Project (Assessment of Impacts and Adaptations to Climate Change), and the UNEP-sponsored Global Adaptation Network (GAN); co-organize VIA-related training workshops for developing country researchers and practitioners, in close cooperation with the above mentioned organizations.

17. Depending on resource availability, plans include activities that respond to growing demand of knowledge in VIA, and communicating this knowledge to a wide range of climate change adaptation stakeholders. Those include:

(a) ***Mining the past for a better future – study report.*** A core challenge to both the policy and scientific communities is how to measure progress in adaptation. At present large scale funding is being considered for implementation of adaptation but relatively few methods and technologies of adaptation have been properly evaluated, especially adaptation in practice. Important questions such as, how we can measure the outcome and effectiveness of adaptation policies and practices, how this experience can be best conveyed to adaptation planners so as to get the most out of adaptation investments, need to be responded. The goal of the study is to find out proactive efforts to reduce vulnerability to disaster, interventions to increase the resilience of communities to a wide range of or stressors including climate variability, and broader poverty reduction programmes. This will require cooperation between the policy and science communities. The outcome of this study would be indicators of progress towards adaptation and the case book of studies that will be a resource book for the policy community.

(b) ***Developing and analysing scenario of climate adaptation and socioeconomic trends.*** The next generation of impact and adaptation assessments require an analysis of future socio-economic and adaptation scenarios. The scenarios should address questions such as: What adaptation will be needed between now and 2030 to cope with early unmitigated impact? And, what are the likely unavoided impacts beyond 2030? PROVIA will both lead in the development of new scenarios, and develop an accessible guide to the methods of scenario development for VIA assessment.

(c) PROVIA has already organized a scoping workshop on ***scientific approaches to monitoring and evaluation of climate adaptation*** in London, August 2013. The workshop identified the areas where gaps in monitoring and evaluation of climate change adaptation remain. The findings and recommendations of the workshop were presented to the UNFCCC Adaptation Committee meeting in September 2013. PROVIA will initiate follow-up activities based on the workshop outcomes to address at least 2-3 urgent gaps in monitoring and evaluation of adaptation.

[11] www.unep.org/provia.

[12] http://start.org.

18. The Fifth PROVIA SSC Meeting was organized in May 2014, in Fortaleza, Brazil, attended by representatives of the UNFCCC secretariat, WMO, Future Earth, IPCC Working Group II Co-chair, UK Department of Energy and Climate Change and the European Commission. The SSC:

(a) Noted that collaboration with partners have improved coordination of international research on the impacts and responses to climate change and addressing gaps in the growing VIA knowledge, especially those gaps that are important to fill to achieve major policy objectives, such as those of the UNFCCC;

(b) The Committee decided to work together with collaborative partners, knowledge networks such as the UNEP-led Global Adaptation Network, and the larger VIA community, UN organization and Governments, and will assist in the outreach and dissemination of the findings of the IPCC Working Group II Fifth Assessment Report.;

(c) The Committee noted the growing demand for PROVIA's Guidance on assessing vulnerability, impacts and adaptation, especially for training on using the Guidance document. PROVIA is already providing technical support to LDCs with country driven process to advance National Adaptation plans (NAPs) based on the Guidance report (To be finalized after the SSC meeting in May 2014).

III. Conclusion

19. PROVIA demonstrated strong potential as an authoritative global initiative responding to the need of governments and other main stakeholders for a single, cooperative instrument that helps coordinate VIA research globally; a need for more effective dialogue between the research and policy communities; and a need to prioritize VIA research and communicate this prioritization to research practitioners, governments and international agencies.

20. PROVIA continues its work, in collaboration with implementing partners, and strives to promote a greater science-policy dialogue while advancing efforts towards identifying research gaps and meeting policy needs in climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation. PROVIA continues its effort to help the scientific community to become more organized and communicate vital VIA information, increasing the ability of societies to effectively anticipate and adapt to climate change impacts.

21. PROVIA will continue working on the four priority activities, especially coordinating and communicating results to various stakeholders, and will also commence new activities. However, as PROVIA continues to deliver, it still faces a number of challenges. PROVIA requires continuous support from governments and partners in order to more effectively respond to the need for better VIA information for decision makers.